

IN-DEPTH GUIDE

Wasps, hornets and yellowjackets: the complete homeowner's guide

Everything a homeowner needs in one place, based on public guidance from the U.S. EPA and CDC, with links to every source.

PestGuardCo.com · To reach an independent local pest control company, call (855) 424-9709.

> Plain-language summary of public guidance from the U.S. EPA and CDC · Updated November 2026

Check these first

1. **Find the nest from a distance**: under eaves, in a shed, in a bush, or a hole in the ground with insects flying in and out.
2. **Note the size**: golf ball, softball or bigger. Bigger nests mean more insects.
3. **Watch the traffic**. A steady stream in and out means an active nest.
4. **Check how close it is** to doors, play areas, decks and walkways.
5. **Check for wasps indoors**, which can mean a nest in a wall or attic.

6 **Ask the household** if anyone has had a serious reaction to a sting before.

If you see this, it usually means...

IF YOU SEE

Small paper nest under the eaves

IT USUALLY MEANS

Paper wasps

NEXT STEP

Keep people away from it. Don't knock it down while insects are active.

IF YOU SEE

Insects flying in and out of a hole in the ground

IT USUALLY MEANS

Likely yellowjackets

NEXT STEP

Mark the spot and keep mowers and kids away.

IF YOU SEE

Large gray football-shaped nest

IT USUALLY MEANS

Likely hornets (or aerial yellowjackets)

NEXT STEP

Keep well away. These defend their nest hard.

IF YOU SEE

Wasps showing up inside the house

IT USUALLY MEANS

A nest in a wall void, attic or chimney area

NEXT STEP

Don't seal the hole; it can push them indoors.

IF YOU SEE

Wasps around trash and sweet drinks

IT USUALLY MEANS

Yellowjackets foraging, common in late summer

NEXT STEP

Cover drinks and trash cans.

How to tell what you have

Wasps and yellowjackets

Smooth, shiny bodies with a thin waist; bright yellow-and-black or brown markings.

Can sting several times. Yellowjackets are drawn to food and trash.

vs

Honey bees

Fuzzy, golden-brown, rounder bodies.

Important pollinators. A beekeeper can often collect a swarm instead of destroying it.

SIZE

1/2 to 1 in.

COLOR

Yellow-black or brown

WHERE

Eaves, decks, sheds, lawns

WHEN

Spring to first frost

Know what you're looking at

Paper wasps build open, umbrella-shaped nests under eaves and railings. Yellowjackets usually nest in the ground or in wall voids and become more aggressive late in summer. Hornets build large, enclosed gray paper nests in trees and under eaves.

Honey bees are different: fuzzy, rounder and important pollinators. A swarm hanging on a branch is often just resting, and local beekeepers sometimes collect them.

Staying safe around stinging insects

CDC/NIOSH guidance for people who work outdoors applies at home too: wear light-colored clothing, avoid strong perfumes, stay calm and still or move away slowly if a single insect is flying around, and don't swat.

If several insects attack, run to get away from them and get indoors or into shade. Bees release a chemical when they sting that can draw others in.

When a sting is an emergency

Most stings cause pain, redness and swelling at the spot. But some people have severe allergic reactions. Call 911 if someone has trouble breathing, swelling of the face, lips or throat, dizziness, or a fast heartbeat after a sting.

People who know they're allergic should carry their prescribed emergency medication and make sure others know where it is.

Why nest removal is usually a pro job

Disturbing a nest can trigger a defensive attack by many insects at once. Ground nests and wall nests are especially hard to treat safely, and blocking an entrance hole can drive insects into the house.

Pros use protective gear, the right products and timing (often evening) to treat and remove nests.

What to do and what to avoid

Do

- Keep kids and pets away from the nest area.
- Use a different door if the nest is near an entrance.
- Cover drinks outdoors and keep trash cans closed.
- Note when the insects are least active (evening, cool weather).
- If someone has a known sting allergy, make sure their emergency medication is on hand.

Avoid

- × Don't knock down, spray, burn or flood a nest yourself, especially large ones or ground nests.
- × Don't swat at wasps near the nest. CDC/NIOSH advises staying calm and moving away slowly.
- × Don't plug a hole in the wall where wasps are going in.
- × Don't run a mower over a ground nest.

Health and safety

- Stings are painful, and some people have serious allergic reactions. CDC/NIOSH: call 911 for trouble breathing, swelling of the face or throat, or dizziness after a sting.
- If attacked by several insects, run away and get indoors or into shade. Bees release a chemical when they sting that can attract others.
- For a sting without a reaction: wash the area, use a cold pack, and don't scratch.

Prevention checklist

- Check eaves, sheds, decks and play sets in spring, when nests are small.
- Seal gaps in siding, soffits and vents (when no insects are using them).
- Keep trash cans and recycling closed, and rinse sweet containers.
- Pick up fallen fruit in the yard.
- Cover food and drinks outdoors.
- Fill old holes in the yard that ground nesters could use.

When to call a pro

Call a pro for any nest near doors or play areas, ground nests, large or high nests, nests in walls, or if anyone in the household is allergic.

1

Identification

Confirming the insect and finding the nest, including ones hidden in walls.

2

Safe removal

Treating and removing the nest with protective gear, often in the evening when insects are inside.

3

Wall voids

Treating nests in walls or attics without driving insects indoors.

4

Prevention tips

Pointing out spots likely to attract new nests.

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Questions

Will a wasp nest go away on its own?

Most wasp and yellowjacket nests die off in late fall and aren't reused. But until then, an active nest near the house is a sting risk.

Is it safe to remove a small nest myself?

Small, early-season nests in open spots carry less risk, but any nest near people, in the ground or in a wall is safer left to a pro.

Why are yellowjackets so aggressive in late summer?

Colonies are at their largest and food is scarcer, so they forage hard around trash, food and drinks.

What if they're honey bees?

Honey bees are valuable pollinators. A local beekeeper or bee removal service can often relocate them.

Sources

Insects and Scorpions at Work (https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/outdoor-workers/about/insects-and-scorpions.html) **CDC / NIOSH**

Do's and Don'ts of Pest Control (https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/dos-and-donts-pest-control) **U.S. EPA**

Citizen's Guide to Pest Control and Pesticide Safety (https://www.epa.gov/safepestcontrol/citizens-guide-pest-control-and-pesticide-safety) **U.S. EPA**

This guide is PestGuard's own plain-language summary of public guidance from U.S. government agencies (EPA and CDC). U.S. federal government publications are generally in the public domain; follow the links to read the originals. It is general information, not an official government publication and not a substitute for an inspection. If you use any pest control product, read and follow the label. In an emergency, call 911. For pesticide questions, the National Pesticide Information Center can help: 1-800-858-7378.